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REPORTS TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Draft report

(Continued)

1. In introducing the Report of the Executive Director to the Economic and Social Council (DP/FPA/1998/2), the Executive Director noted that the report had been prepared in the format jointly agreed to by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Food Programme. The report covered a wide range of issues, including funding arrangements, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of the major United Nations Conferences and summits. In response to a request of the Executive Board, the report included updated information on the work of UNFPA in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention.

2. The Executive Director underscored the Fund's strong commitment to the implementation of various General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions of the Executive Board on operational activities, as well as the Fund's active participation in and commitment to the Secretary-General's programme of reform. With the support and guidance of the Executive Board, UNFPA continued to put into practice the long-standing commitment to coordination and collaboration in meeting the needs and priorities of all partner countries. The Executive Director noted that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) pilot phase was an important part of those efforts. She stated that it was already clear that the UNDAF process facilitates a coordination of approach as regards data systems, situational analyses, monitoring and follow-up reporting to conferences. Overall, that would lead to a more solid basis for the formulation of programmes of assistance to a given country. The Executive Director observed that continued common attention was directed to issues related to national execution and the shared goal of strengthening national capacity. UNFPA had brought to the attention of

other members of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) lessons learned from its experience in that area.

3. Several delegations stated that the UNFPA report to the Economic and Social Council was clear and comprehensive. Delegations welcomed, in particular, the focus on the UNDAF, the United Nations resident coordinator system and the Fund's commitment to the United Nations reform process. A few delegations observed that the report should be more analytical. One delegation noted that the report should have more substance. Some delegations noted that additional information on the follow-up to the ICPD and progress achieved by the United Nations Development Group should also have been included.

4. One delegation, commending the analytical approach of the UNFPA report, noted that it captured the work of the Fund succinctly and comprehensively. The delegation added that the report clearly expressed the challenges and opportunities that UNFPA faced. The same delegation noted that the report should include more information on ICPD follow-up. The delegation also recommended that UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF should prepare, for submission to the upcoming session of the Economic and Social Council, a consolidated list of areas where intergovernmental action regarding funds and programmes was needed and would, the delegation noted, greatly assist delegations in structuring their comments for the triennial review of operational activities. The same delegation was pleased to note the importance accorded to the UNDG, the piloting phase of UNDAF and to the strengthening of the resident coordinator system. The delegation commended the measures undertaken to establish ownership of the system by participating agencies, including expanding the selection pool for resident coordinators and refining the terms of reference to ensure the greatest possible impartiality and neutrality; the secondment of staff from agencies other than UNDP to UNDG; greater harmonization of programming cycles and procedures; and increased use of common services and common premises. On the issue of financing for development, the delegation observed that alternatives to assessed or multi-year contributions should be explored, including a greater role for the private sector.

5. Another delegation, while welcoming the Fund's observations on the UNDAF process and noting their usefulness to the Economic and Social Council, noted that it was not fully satisfied with the report, which needed to be more analytical and less descriptive. The delegation observed that additional information on the follow-up to ICPD should have been included. Another delegation, noting that the report should be more problem-oriented, stated that it should include recommendations for action to be taken by the Council. The same delegation added that the report should include information on the Fund's relationship with the Bretton Woods institutions, and noted that there should be a recommendation from the Executive Board to the Council suggesting systematic reporting in the future on collaboration with these institutions. The delegation added that future reports should also contain a specific section on operational activities in the area of humanitarian assistance. Another delegation inquired about what could be done to increase collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions.

6. Another delegation observed that the annual reports to the Economic and Social Council were particularly important because of the upcoming triennial

policy review of operational activities and the role that the Council played in that review. Noting the key role played by UNFPA in the follow-up to ICPD, the delegation stated that it would have liked the report to make reference to the ICPD+5 process. The delegation welcomed the Fund's efforts to increase national capacity-building and encouraged UNFPA to continue that work, which would help to ensure country ownership, programme sustainability and enhanced impact of United Nations development projects and programmes. The same delegation also welcomed the Fund's efforts to decentralize activities further to the field and noted that the Council needed to consider the question of the harmonization of overall system-wide decentralization, including that of the specialized agencies. On the subject of the Fund's enhanced collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions, the delegation asked how the collegial relations with the institutions translated into policy and programming actions at the institutional and country levels. The delegation commended the progress made by UNFPA in promoting national execution. The delegation suggested including a discussion on the use of direct execution at a future Executive Board session. With regard to monitoring and evaluation, the delegation suggested that UNFPA adopt evaluation compliance reports which should be submitted to the Board for discussion, as was the case for UNDP. The delegation also inquired about the progress made in joint, strategic evaluations with other institutions, including the World Bank, as called for in General Assembly resolution 50/120.

7. One delegation, while expressing its appreciation for the activities being undertaken within the UNDAF, noted that even at that early stage it would like to see strong monitoring and evaluation of those activities. The same delegation drew attention to paragraph 5 of the UNFPA report and commended the Fund for succinctly delineating key areas in which further efforts were needed for strengthening the resident coordinator system. Another delegation also noted that it attached great importance to the UNDAF process and to strengthening collaboration among United Nations funds and programmes, the World Bank, donors and other development partners. It underscored the desirability of UNFPA focusing on its areas of comparative advantage.

8. Another delegation, while welcoming the Fund's commitment to the United Nations reform process, noted that the experience of UNDAF viewed from the perspective of UNDP appeared to be quite different from that of UNFPA. The delegation stated that it shared the concerns that had been expressed in the report of the Fund and asked to know more about the modalities being devised within the context of UNDG to address the problems encountered by small organizations such as UNFPA. The same delegation stated that it strongly supported the idea contained in paragraph 4 of the UNFPA report that the UNDAF exercise should not duplicate past programming efforts or require a review of processes that had already been completed.

9. One delegation noted that there were some concerns associated with the UNDAF and the UNDG. For example, the legal framework of the UNDG should be examined. With regard to the resident coordinator system, the delegation stated that the mode of the relationship with the host country should be delineated as some problems had been encountered in relations with counterparts. The delegation also inquired about the cost implications and cost-effectiveness of the UNDAF and about the relationship of the country strategy note (CSN), UNDAF

and the national planning framework. The delegation underscored that the national planning framework should not be diluted by the CSN and UNDAF.

10. Another delegation, expressing its appreciation for the information the Fund had provided regarding strengthening the resident coordinator system, noted that more information should be given on the harmonization of country programmes. The delegation added that the figures on resources in paragraphs 22-26 did not represent firm commitments. The delegation added that with reference to paragraph 15, additional information should have been included on the problems encountered in the Fund's technical support services (TSS) arrangements.

11. One delegation, while commending the report for being well prepared, stated that at a time when many developing countries were suffering economic hardships and their development efforts were being hampered, it was important to enhance and not diminish the role of UNFPA and UNDP. Noting that national execution should be both accelerated and taken more seriously, the delegation stated that there should be objective evaluations of national execution capability, and bureaucratic procedures within organizations should not be allowed to inhibit national execution.

12. Another delegation, while observing that the UNDAF and the resident coordinator system were good mechanisms and the core of the United Nations reform process, noted that ownership of the development process by programme countries should be fully respected. The same delegation commended the Fund for employing local experts in developing countries and stated that that policy should be fully implemented and national execution should be increased. The delegation expressed concern at the shortage of core resources and the consequences of that on UNFPA and UNDP programmes. The delegation urged donors to show greater corporate responsibility in that regard.

13. One delegation, speaking also on behalf of two others, noted that the reports to the Economic and Social Council should be focused and analytical documents and should point out areas where collaboration could be strengthened. The delegation added that the UNFPA report under consideration marked an improvement over past such reports in that it highlighted lessons learned. Another delegation also commended the Fund for having included various lessons learned in the report.

14. Another delegation noted that it shared the Fund's concerns expressed in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the report regarding strengthening the resident coordinator system to enable it to provide better coordination and effective support at the country level. Another delegation observed the importance of simplifying the programming process and avoiding another layer of bureaucracy.

15. One delegation noted that the reports to the Economic and Social Council should make some contribution towards addressing the poverty indicators of any country. Concomitantly, the reports should be more analytical. Recognizing that it may be difficult to cover a range of issues given the page limitation of the document, the delegation recommended selecting a few key issues and analysing them more thoroughly. The same delegation supported the Fund's adding resources for and mainstreaming HIV/AIDS prevention activities. The delegation

underscored the merit of UNDP and UNFPA preparing an additional one-page note delineating key issues that could be discussed by the Council at its upcoming session.

16. Another delegation agreed that a short note listing key issues pertaining to improved coordination of operational activities should be prepared for submission to the Economic and Social Council. The delegation suggested that such a note could be prepared by the UNDG. With regard to monitoring and evaluation, the same delegation asked for information on how the Fund's Office of Oversight and Evaluation (OOE) helped UNFPA in assessing programme experience and, in particular, whether the OOE drew out and synthesized lessons learned from evaluations and shared these with the rest of the Fund.

17. The Executive Director thanked the delegations for their constructive comments. She noted that the suggestion to submit a short list of key issues for consideration by the Economic and Social Council was a very useful one. She also agreed with the suggestion that the decentralization process was an important item for further discussion. She noted that UNFPA was issuing a letter to its field offices reminding them that they had decentralized authority within the limits of the approved country programme and subprogrammes. With regard to monitoring and evaluation, the Executive Director noted that many steps had been taken to harmonize these processes and that the issue was also being addressed by such system-wide mechanisms as the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and an Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation. She agreed that joint evaluations were a good way of reviewing programmes and projects and that joint thematic evaluations needed to be carried out. On the topic of national capacity-building, the Executive Director observed that the Fund had put the item on the agenda of the UNDG. Also, at the annual session of the Board, the Fund would present a report on the absorptive capacity of programme countries. With regard to national execution, she underscored the importance of addressing the needs of national partners. The Executive Director noted that it was the Fund's goal to have full national execution; however, that required addressing various issues, including financial reporting and auditing in countries. She noted that additional information on the follow-up to ICPD could have been provided, but the Fund had sought to report on items that involved inter-agency collaboration.

18. With regard to the coordinated follow-up to conferences, the Executive Director noted that the recommendations of the three inter-agency task forces of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) had been adopted by CCPOQ and a letter from the Chair had been sent out to all concerned. She observed that further efforts were needed to increase utilization by the field offices of the outputs of the task forces. The Executive Director noted that in her meetings with resident coordinators she drew attention to the following key points: the centrality of the UNDAF process; the importance of a common data system; gender as a key issue around which the whole system could work; the usefulness of thematic groups not simply as forums for information exchange but as an important means of identifying programming gaps and duplications, as well as a venue for policy dialogue involving all development partners, including the Government and non-governmental organizations; the importance of policy and programme reviews involving all members of the United Nations country team; and

the key role of the resident coordinator system in promoting a coordinated follow-up to global conferences.

19. In responding to the comments and questions of delegations, the Deputy Executive Director (Policy and Administration) underscored that UNFPA was firmly committed to the UNDAF and the resident coordinator system. He noted that the report to the Economic and Social Council had sought to identify areas that needed attention, notably through the UNDG process, including problems resulting from the dual responsibility of the United Nations Resident Coordinator also being the UNDP Resident Representative. The Deputy Executive Director stated that UNFPA was committed to the promotion of national execution of country programmes as evidenced by the increasing amount of resources being channelled through this execution modality, from 31 per cent of country programme resources in 1996 to 41 per cent in 1997. He added that the Fund's programming process was based on decentralized authority, which had evolved incrementally through a number of stages, including an initial pilot phase. He noted that full decentralization of programming authority required strengthening country offices in terms of staff and infrastructure, streamlining guidelines, training staff at country and headquarter levels, and improving management information systems. With regard to humanitarian assistance, the Deputy Executive Director observed that since the Governing Council had authorized the Fund to provide emergency assistance in 1994, UNFPA had been providing such assistance through executing agencies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. On the subject of relations with the Bretton Woods institutions, he noted that UNFPA worked very closely with them on operational and policy matters. The Fund's Geographical Divisions regularly consulted with the World Bank to avoid duplications in programming and to identify gaps that could be addressed. The Fund also had technical consultations with the World Bank and would be a co-partner on reproductive-health training.

20. Responding to the query concerning the function of the UNFPA Office of Oversight and Evaluation, he noted that one main function of the OOE was to undertake thematic evaluations and synthesize the lessons learned. In addition, the OOE took into account other findings and lessons learned, for example, those deriving from audits and policy application reviews. The Deputy Executive Director (Policy and Administration) concluded by thanking delegations for their encouraging and constructive comments.